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DBR TESTED: 2015 SUZUKI, BETA, HUSQVARNA AND SHERCO MODELS RIDDEN N' RATED

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© RAY ARCHER

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JEREMY VAN HOREBEEK MENTALLY
PREPARES FOR THE BATTLE AHEAD

© SARAH GUTIERREZ



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MTB MOUNTAIN MEN!

THE HARD ENDURO ELITE BATTLE IT OUT IN DRACULA'S BACKYARD...

Words and photos by Future7Media

Now in its 11th year the Red Bull Romaniacs shows no sign of slowing down. In fact this year was the biggest yet. Sold out months in advance, a record number of 350 riders from 35 different nations settled in Sibiu, Romania for the week long race in the Carpathian Mountains.

For a number of reasons 2014 will be talked about for many years to come. Defending champion Graham Jarvis had his sights set on securing a record breaking fifth win – and his fourth in a row – but it

wasn't to be for the Hard Enduro maestro because this year he finally met his match.

On a roll from his Erzberg triumph Jonny Walker finally beat Jarvis at Romaniacs to take his first win and that victory also recorded him as the youngest ever Romaniacs victor. Behind the leading duo South Africa's Wade Young turned a few heads on his way to finishing third. At just 18 years of age Wade became the youngest ever podium finisher of the race. In a sport that was maybe once seen as one for the 'old-timers' it seems that times are changing in Hard Enduro. The youth are finally winning...

JONNY WALKER

On beating the streak king...



For Jonny Walker winning the 2014 Red Bull Romaniacs didn't just happen. No way. It's a result that's been three years in the making. Not only winning Romaniacs but also beating Graham Jarvis – the most successful man in the history of the race – takes time to figure out. You've got to learn from your mistakes, take everything on board and hope that Lady Luck is in your favour. This year everything came together for Walker. On a roll since winning the Red Bull Hare Scramble, he was able to tick the Red Bull Romaniacs off his list.

"I came into this race with my thinking cap on. The Red Bull Romaniacs is completely different to every other Hard Enduro. It's a four-day ball breaker and not just two hours of torture like Erzberg. You've got to be clever as well as fast. In the past I've come out all guns blazing for the prologue and tried to win. But winning that can be a handicap for the following day. Hanging back was a difficult thing to do – it felt wrong – but it was what I had to do.

"Starting Day One I had a five minute deficit on Jarvis and then a further five minutes to make up on Paul Bolton who started first. With a bit of a track to follow I got my head down. I knew Day One was going to be critical so I had to make it count. I caught Graham before the service and tried to break away. He was having none of it so we ended up riding together and reeled in Bolts. Winning the day put me into the lead.

"As the Day One winner I was faced with the task of leading everyone out on Day Two but I was confident in what I could do. Unfortunately I got a little excited and rushed into a water hole and drowned my bike. I had to tip it upside down, squeeze out the air filter and change the spark plug before I could get going again. By that stage Graham caught me so I was only able to ride with him to the finish.

"Oddly on Day Three I just didn't ride well. I caught Graham but was gooned out everywhere and just not feeling it. It was strange. I knew I was off my rhythm so instead of trying to force it I settled in and rode with him. Along the way I was trying to work out my time advantage. I knew I still had the lead – it wasn't much – but I was in front.

"Day Four it was all on the line. I had to push hard. I'll admit I was nervous. I went to bed thinking about the race and I woke up still thinking about it. But once I set off first that all went away. I got on with what I had to do. When I got to the service point I was nine minutes up on Graham. It was a massive relief, but I still had about 60 miles to go so anything could happen. Entering the finishing arena I knew I had it almost won once I got up that final bloody hill. I made it so far and then it was a bit of a panic to get the bike dragged up the last bit. Rolling into the finish line as the winner was fantastic."



TEST TEST



ED BRADLEY KICKSTARTS OUR 17-PAGE 2015
BIKE TEST SPECIAL WITH A FULL AND FRANK
REVIEW OF NEXT YEAR'S HUSKY MXERS...

Words by Ed Bradley

My final year of racing in the schoolboys was in 1989 when I rode a 125cc Cagiva. I know that this will make no sense to many riders today who have no idea what a Cagiva is yet alone the relevance to this story! Anyway, at the end of 1989 Cagiva bought the Husqvarna company so in 1990 I got to race a 250cc two-stroke Husky – six months of my racing career that is best glazed over with the least said about it the better.

But that was Husqvarna then. Two decades later and after another change of ownership the brand is now in the very capable hands of KTM who it has to be said are masters of marketing and branding. And so the revamped Husqvarna brand has gone back to its roots using 'core values' of tradition, nature, premium components and racing.

It's a strong base to build on and in 2015 you'll see Jason Anderson racing in the AMA Supercross series on board a factory 450 Husqvarna and after one season of racing MXGP we could expect to see even higher profile riders on the factory team in Europe too.

At such short notice the 2014 Huskys were almost thrown together to get them out on the market. 12 months on and they've had some time to develop the bikes with some small but important changes.

With the technical changes comes a new look and all the bikes have new graphics and

seat cover material. I'm struggling to find any love for the front fender that reminds me of a toothpick but I'm digging the look of the bar pad and the grips. Overall here's no doubting that the bikes look trick!

I had a few surprises as I jumped on the different models and my first one came from the little 125cc two-stroke! The bike is knocking out 40hp as standard and to protect the powerhouse against detonation the one-two-tiddly has a new ignition curve as a safety measure which is great news for those of you who are happy to just get it out the box and grip it and rip it! To help get the motor to produce the many ponies, the Husky uses an improved Boyesen reed valve and upgraded Vertex piston that improves reliability too.

Sitting on the bike you get to feel how light the 125 two-stroke is compared to the four bangers and as I revved it up before taking it to the sandy track the thought of 'how was this super light, small bike going to pull me around the track?' crossed my mind. Am I going to be on the clutch everywhere? The bike sounds crisp and clean with a medium exhaust note – no bottom-end grunt but it's a lovely clean and crisp sounding motor.

Out on the track this bike rides awesome! The little kitten sounding engine has the power of a tiger – it's so strong and fast. It has an easy bottom-end power that is quite nondescript, hardly noticeable as it effortlessly generates momentum into the super strong mid-range >>



SIX

OF

THE

ENDURO

BETA JUST MIGHT HAVE DELIVERED A KILLER BLOW TO THE COMPETITION FOR 2015 BY UNLEASHING SIX POTENT RACE MACHINES THAT ARE READY TO RIP...

Words by **Geoff Walker**

When it comes to a manufacturer creating a buzz my hat has to come off to the Beta crew. The Italian manufacturer is growing in stature and is proving to the enduro world that it's here to stay by developing a range of machines which are almost unmatched in reliability and strength as they utilise modern facilities, upbeat personnel and a need to provide their importers and dealers with fresh bikes on every order.

What this basically means is that if a new setting is found to work well on any of the bikes then the next batch will be built with those improved settings as standard. The information is also passed on through the distributors to the dealers so they can communicate the improvements with their customers.

Reliability and strong power are key to the Beta family and so far they are hitting the mark with machines capable of running at all levels of competition. On the competition side they mix up their development with riders in the Enduro World Championship (both indoor and outdoor), extreme/hard enduros in Europe and the USA as well as domestic championships around the world.

The bikes look and simplicity in build show a commitment to the customer as the wheel is a difficult thing to re-invent so to speak. Yes, there are parts which look similar and may indeed be shared with other manufacturers but this can in no way be construed as a negative.

If you have the task of building bikes from scratch you look for the best possible parts at the best possible price from every source and as it was explained to me this is the true basis of a quality bike staying within the realms of affordability.

If something is being manufactured on a large scale and can be outsourced then this is what must be done. Items like brakes, wheels, suspension units etc simply cannot be made in-house as costs would escalate beyond belief. This is why manufacturers share some suppliers and the quality in some important departments across each manufacturers ranges stay consistent in quality.

Beta have made more changes this year than any other manufacturer and with some new capacity levels in the four-stroke range they are giving the customer something to think about.

The two-strokes stay the same in capacity with the 250 and 300 models coming in for improvements in the power-valve actuation, ignition and overall motor. The 250 is upgraded to a dual power-valve spring system just like the 2014 300 which controls the delivery of power in a more controlled fashion.

The 300 moves to the motor set-up of the 2014 racing edition which features a new cylinder with a reduced exhaust outlet width and outlet-flap coupling to make for better response. With this boosted increase in response the combustion chamber profile has been reworked to smooth the transition in power through the rev range to keep the delivery as smooth as possible.

Other changes include – a new FMF silencer on the 250 with a smaller diameter internal pipe to allow for an increase

in the precision of the delivery from down low in the rev range as well as an increase in peak revs.

The Sachs 48mm front forks have undergone some much needed work. They now have 'three slots' in the extension pistons to improve oil flow which is aimed at absorbing big hits with more progression. The forks also have modifications aimed at smoothing out the action of the fork from a friction point of view. A spring-support release system has been added to help with rotational friction. All other bushes and contact points have undergone modifications to increase the smooth mechanical action including the spring profile to allow for a better fitting and seating position.

The Sachs rear shock has received a modified piston to improve the oil flow and create less build up of heat and therefore increase the damping feel for longer with improved fade resistance.

The seats have been made slightly softer for those long days when the arms lose a little power and the derrière becomes a larger part of the controlling factor of the bike...

The final 'improvement' is an apparent move to an FIM approved handlebar pad. Holy moly! The FIM have to approve your bar pad now? Nice...

The four-stroke range from Beta comes in for some awesome changes to keep the technical minded amused. New capacities take some balls to produce as following the lead is the easy option. Most of us know that a few ccs either way will not make or break a bike but when the thought is put into action and that thought is of performance and rideability and overall usage of the given power range and feel then things become clear.

Beta have re-worked the capacities in all but their smallest available bike as well as lightening all engines by as much as 1.5KGs to give you – the customer – something lighter and to attempt to optimise your riding fun by giving the bikes across the range a more rideable feel with no lack of power.

Everything about the direction they have taken is to reduce moving weight internally to provide a better ride. Beta have stuck with carburetors long after the other manufacturers have gone to fuel injection as they have believed the carb gives a better feeling to the rider. They have again stuck with carbons on the bikes except on the 350.

The 350 receives a Synerject fuel injection system with a 42mm throttle body. The Synerject system is providing a new sensation in fuel injection as it is designed with a stepper system when you roll the throttle off to give it more of a carb feeling as it provides small boosts of charge to reduce engine braking.

New crankshafts are used across the range which are lighter and reduce gyroscopic effect. The conrods are shorter and lighter which reduces the alternating masses with the entire combustion unit being lowered on the 390, 430 and 480 machines to lower and compact the masses to a more beneficial centre of gravity. The crankshaft balance shaft has also been redesigned to work in harmony with the new crank design.

The crank cases have been completely redesigned to reduce weight and increase stiffness, oil flow and efficiency.

The pistons used are a 'box-in-box' design which >>



THE BEST!





GO, JOHNNY O!

US SUPERSTAR JOHNNY O'MARA HAD A PRETTY SUCCESSFUL TIME OF IT IN EUROPE TOO AS JACK BURNICLE EXPLAINS...

Words and photos by **Jack Burnicle**

Two days before the American MX and Trophee des Nations team was due to leave for Europe in September 1981, Johnny O'Mara received a phone call from his Honda team

manager Dave Arnold asking him to pack his bags. Steve Wise, winner of the second moto at Unadilla's US 250GP two months earlier, had injured his ribs practising and couldn't ride.

At first O'Mara, a 20 year-old Californian from Simi Valley, experienced mixed emotions. The AMA's original team selection had focussed on the old guard of Bob Hannah, Mark Barnett, Kent Howerton and Broc Glover but they collectively refused!

Honda America's new boss, Belgian import Roger De Coster, stepped in and offered his

team's services but overlooked new recruit O'Mara, who concentrated on preparations for the Trans-USA series that autumn.

So he'd never actually ridden a 500! But this was a chance to prove himself on the world stage and show Honda America and the US fans that he was good enough to have been selected in their original line-up. He said yes, made his maiden voyage to Europe, helped re-write the record books and became an international star!

European journalists and fans dismissed the American Honda quartet of Danny LaPorte, Donnie Hansen, Chuck Sun and O'Mara as a 'second rate' replacement team. The promoter of the first event, the 250cc Trophee des at Lommel, stated publicly that the American squad was 'a joke'. But Sun had won the 1980 500 nationals and the US 500GP at Carlsbad, O'Mara a muddy 125GP at Lexington, Ohio and

LaPorte the 1979 500 nationals, while Hansen had just finished third in the 250 nationals behind Howerton and Hannah and O'Mara second in the 125 nationals behind Barnett. They cleverly played down their own chances. "I've never seen sand this deep....No, we don't have tracks like this in America...It looks really tough..."

The USA then dominated Saturday's 20 minute qualifying races, which the host nation sat out as reigning champions. Everyone was fully convinced that Sunday's 40 minute-plus two lap motos would wipe the Americans out. Knowledgeable team boss De Coster, who had only retired from grand prix racing 12 months earlier, suggested his boys ignore Belgian Andre Vromans, then the fastest sand rider in the world.

A vast partisan crowd assembled on a bright sunny day and gasped as O'Mara grabbed



the holeshot before Vromans took over on his Yamaha. But behind Johnny his American team-mates were running third, fourth and sixth! Bewildered Belgian fans desperately urged on their own second string squaddies Harry Everts, Eric Geboers and Marc Velkeneers, the team badly missing injured world champions Georges Jobe and Andre Malherbe. Sun slipped back to eighth place but up front O'Mara, LaPorte and Hansen totalled nine points after that astonishing first moto against second-placed Belgium's three-rider score of 20!

The defending champions responded in race two, Vromans and Geboers in charge from the start ahead of LaPorte and Hansen, with O'Mara and Sun buried in the pack alongside Everts and teenager Velkeneers. But by half distance the tide had turned. Geboers and Everts had bailed out while LaPorte tenaciously pursued sandmeister Vromans, O'Mara

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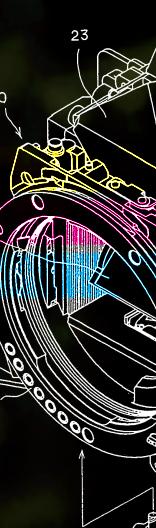




LAVAY DAYS

WHAT DOES MXGP RACER TOMMY SEARLE DO
ON HIS DAY OFF? GO RIDING OF COURSE...

Photos by Nuno Laranjeira





WATSONS¹

WHERE WILL THE WATSONS GO NEXT AND WHY WE SHOULD
BE EXCITED ABOUT THE LATEST SIBLINGS TO ATTACK THE
HIGHEST SPHERES OF MOTOCROSS...

Words by Adam Wheeler Photos by Ray Archer



The Watson brothers, Nathan (20) and Ben (16) are recognised names in British motocross. Both are now ready to start regularly competing on the international stage to stretch and prosper their careers. They are two riders, almost-athletes and family that are on the cusp. But of what exactly?

Through 250cc to MX1 to MXGP, from prize money and short calendars to a narrowing elite, from open accessibility to new, intense levels of intensity and skill – Grand Prix has changed immensely and it might not be the welcoming arena of racing it once was for aspiring professionals.

However, on the other hand the increasingly exclusive nature of the FIM World Championship might also be more enticing. It is hard to break into that factory sect and then harder to stay there. Maybe it is more of a challenge now than ever to be a Grand Prix star.

That Nathan and Ben – sons of Rob Meek and Deb Watson – have speed, promise and a bevy of impressive youth and junior achievement behind them is beyond doubt. What is uncertain is where they will go, how they will get there and what possibilities really lie ahead for Britain's off-road racing talent generally. Is a career as a motocross pro the rewarding and worthwhile option that it once was? The Watsons, Adam Sterry and people like Conrad Mewse are wading through the modern reality of the sport.

Through talking to both Nathan and Ben it seems that the goal of competing at Grand Prix is more than a step towards a decent pay packet and a sustainable vocation. Like some of the current GP riders struggling to justify the risk-versus-reward being at Grand Prix is a symbol in itself. You might deserve your shot or you could pay to get in the door but if you don't have the goods then you won't stay. It is about status – a stamp of quality.

The big difference for the Watsons is that the model where teams pay a hefty salary and the rider just jumps on the bike is eroding for all but the few at the very top margin. The modern era places more emphasis on riders taking care of their own visibility outside of race results. A young, fast and promising racer is a treat. One that is smart enough to generate his support is an added and valuable bonus.

It is encouraging to hear both of the Watsons talk about Grand Prix as part of their ambition. Maybe it is youthful exuberance and desire to test themselves but the brothers have already been around the sport long enough to see how teams operate and how racing is structured and how it funds itself in order to exist. They are both aiming for the sharp end and that involves targeting the Cairoli-Herlings standard.

Aside from the politics and direction of the sport and the difficulty now existing for years in GPs the Watsons are a 'hopefully-soon-to-make-it' example of the real heart of motocross and that is about a person wanting to race a dirt-bike hard with some support from family, friends or local sponsors. Perhaps rightly or wrongly there doesn't seem to be some grand career plan, no get rich fast scheme. It is just about the bike and the opportunity to improve and do well.

Initially operating out of Dantec Husqvarna, and only in the UK, Nathan has tasted life as a factory representative and has endured where the likes of Husqvarna's Todd Waters and Tyla Rattray have failed by staying injury free and bringing the works FC450 to the chequered flag in three Grands Prix.

By taking an unexpected window of opportunity in MXGP the cheerful Watson has turned heads and put his name into conversations among the awnings of teams in the GP paddock.



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